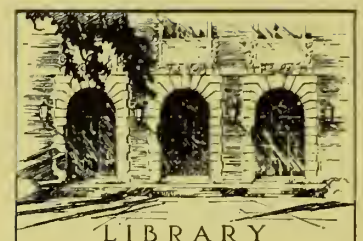

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THREE TYPES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

BY

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THESIS

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Martha Lucile Meloy

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The middle of the nineteenth century was a "storm and stress" period in the religious life of England and as such gives an especially rich field for the study of religious experience. Taking George Eliot, Cardinal Newman, and Lord Tennyson as our three types, we shall attempt to show what the predominating forces, which influenced them in religious life, were and, as far as possible, what tendencies of mind led them to react as they did to the forces which were thrown around them.

The early part of the century had been marked by extreme lethargy in the established church while the deepest and most fervid religion of that time was to be found among the Evangelicals. As the interest in science quickened, however, and the theory of Evolution developed until it culminated in Darwins " Origin of the Species", 1859, religious movements of marked significance came into being.

On the one hand, the study of science led many to cast themselves off from the religion of the past and, in their scepticism of it, to turn to materialism, utilitarianism or positivism. Others, terrified by these movements, sought to throw themselves athwart the scientific tendencies of their age and turned back to the middle ages for their light. A last group attempted to reconcile the old and the new by building up liberalism in theology.

Bearing in mind then the unparalleled challenge of Science to old beliefs and the various movements which sprang

up in answer to this challenge, we shall proceed to our study of the religious experiences of George Eliot, Newman and Tennyson.

Chapter II

GEORGE ELIOT

In studying the religious experience of George Eliot, we are dealing with a woman of whom her husband and biographer, Mr. J. W. Cross spoke some very significant words when he said:" Her roots were down in the pre-railroad, pre-telegraphic period - the days of fine old leisure - but the fruit was formed during an era of extraordinary activity in scientific and mechanical discovery."[1]

Born into an age, in which the established creeds were struggling to maintain themselves against the onslaught of science and rationalism, George Eliot's soul was one of the battle grounds where this conflict raged. Although it is difficult to determine just which elements were final victors in this struggle, we shall attempt to show the predominating religious forces at three different periods in her life. Mr Cross says that "hers was a large slow growing nature;"[2] and because of this fact, the periods into which I have divided her religious experience cover most of her life. The first one I shall call the period of orthodoxy, 1828-1841; the second, the period of reaction, 1841-1856; and the last, a period of toleration, 1856-1880.

In the period of orthodoxy from the age of nine to twenty-one,we find three stages in her development, the first beginning with her school life at Nuneaton in 1828. Up to this time, Mary

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1. Cross, J. W. Life and Letters of George Eliot, New York, Vol.I, Chapter I, p. 5.

2. Ibid., p. 8.

Anne Evans had spent a happy childhood at Griff, a comfortable country house set back among the green fields and brown canals of Midland, England ,in a home little touched by the currents of the outside world. Her family were members of the Established Church and probably considered their religion a form of "proud respectability"[1] as did the Tullivers and Dodsons in"The Mill on the Floss". Mary Anne, imaginative, affectionate, and sensitive was destined to have a religious life of far more tempestuous nature than this placid, unquestioning conformity.

Miss Deakin tells us in her book"The Early Life of George Eliot", that her "religious history begins, not with the acceptance of Evangelicalism, but with those early years, in which her dim instincts were satisfied with the simple religion of the "unawakened church", years in which she felt awe enough from the mere quietness and solemnity of church service without understanding very much of it."[2] Doubtlessly her early days spent as nature's child had an unconscious influence on her religious life but it was not until her school life at Nuneaton brought her into touch with enthusiastic advocates of a dissenting faith that we find a conscious beginning of religious development.

The course of events shaped themselves in the following manner. A certain Miss Lewis was chief governess of the school and at the same time an ardent professor of the Evangelical religion.

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1. Mill on the Floss, Book II, Chap. III.

2. Deakin, Mary H. Early Life of George Eliot, Chap. I.

Mary Anne mingled little with the girls of her own age but soon became a fast friend of Miss Lewis. She spent all her spare hours with this beloved teacher, who remained her chief friend and confidante for many years, and who soon won her as a disciple to the Evangelical Church. Thus George Eliot at this early age made her venture into religious life by adopting a faith foreign to the orthodox of her fathers, although her membership was never withdrawn from the church of England.

In passing from this period, I shall call attention to only one other fact; and that is that she became passionately fond of reading at this time and took great delight in De Foe's "History of the Devil", "Pilgrims Progress", and the Waverly Novels. Her early acquaintance with Scott may have sowed into her mind the first seeds of doubt, for his pictures of moral life with no reference to Christianity impressed her forcibly. These doubts, however, were submerged by established creed, although they were to assert themselves in later days.

The second stage of her early development came when at the age of thirteen, she was sent to the Miss Franklin's school at Coventry. These ladies were daughters of a Baptist minister and they were much attracted by the bright, sensitive girl who had come to them and did all in their power to help her development both intellectually and spiritually. Probably the best picture we have of George Eliot at the time she came under their influence is that given of Maggie Tulliver at this same age in "The Mill on the Floss" "She was a creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge, with an ear

straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her; with a blind unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life and give her soul a sense of home in it."[1]

This yearning for spiritual satisfaction, combined with her tendency to lean on strong natures with whom she came in contact, caused her to imbibe very quickly the Calvinistic teachings of these ladies. To gain the satisfaction which her soul craved, she threw herself with unrestrained ardour into the religious activities of the school. We find that prayer meetings were the order of the day here, and if our imaginations can carry us back to an old fashioned room in that Coventry school in the year 1835, perhaps we can catch a picture of the tall, dark girl with luminous eyes who is the center and life of an overheated group of young Calvinists, earnestly talking or pouring out their hearts in prayer with eager devotion. Keeping this picture in view, we pass to the last stage of her youthful experience.

Her life at Coventry only lasted until the beginning of 1836 for she was called home during the last of the old year because of the illness of her mother. The mother died during the following summer, and her older sister was married soon afterwards; so Mary Anne with her passionate longings was left to spend the next five years amidst a narrow environment of unthinking, highly respectable self complacency. It is true that she had embraced a dogmatic form of Calvinism, but religion to her was ever dynamic, never static, and she was possessed of a spirit of unrest. It seems that George

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1. Mill on the Floss, Book III, Chap. V.

(no page 7)

Eliot expressed her own feelings at this time when she said of Maggie, placed in similar circumstances;"She thought it was part of the hardship of her life that there was laid upon her the burden of larger wants than others seemed to feel - that she had to endure this wide, hopeless yearning for that something, whatever it was, that was greatest and best on this earth."[1]

Then just as Maggie, hungry for spiritual and intellectual companionship, found a source of new inspiration in the life of Thomas a Kempis; so George Eliot, fired with his teaching of renunciation, thought to stifle her eager longings by throwing herself into religious asceticism, with the same fervour which had plunged her into Calvinistic prayer meetings a few years before. "It flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasures; and for the first time she saw the possibility of shifting the position from which she looked at the gratification of her own desires of taking a stand out of herself and looking at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole." [2]

In her zeal for killing all earthly longings, she gave up feminine vanities and became careless of personal appearance while she eagerly devoted herself to clothing clubs and other charities. She visited London with her brother in 1838 but refused to attend the theatres, spending her evenings reading in her room while she

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1. Mill on the Floss, Book IV, Chap. III.
2. Mill on the Floss, Book IV, Chap. III.

writes to Miss Lewis: "I can only sigh for those who are multiplying earthly ties which, though powerful enough to detach their hearts and thoughts from heaven, are so brittle as to be liable to be snapped asunder at every breeze,------ I do not deny that there may be many who can partake with a high degree of zest of all the lawful enjoyments the world can offer, and yet live in near communion with their God; but I confess that in my short experience and narrow sphere of action, I have never been able to attain to this. I find, as Dr. Johnson said respecting his wine, total abstinence much easier than moderation.------Oh that we could live only for eternity! that we could realize its nearness."[1]

Another instance that shows the extremity of her asceticism may be seen in the following words written to Miss Lewis, for George Eliot, was all through her life passionately fond of music. "It would not cost me any regrets if the only music heard in our land were that of strict worship, nor can I think a pleasure that involves the devotion of all the time and powers of an immortal being to the acquirement of an expertness in so useless (at least in minety-nine cases out of a hundred) accomplishment can be quite pure or elevating its tendency." [2]

She condemned in general the reading of fiction, especially religious and domestic novels, saying that all their benefits can be derived from the reading of history, although she made exceptions of standard works such as Don Quixote, Gil Blas, Byron's Poetical

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1. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. I, p. 20

2. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. I. p. 24.

Romances, Southey's Romances, Scott's Novels, and poetry. She devoted her own time to the reading of religious works such as: "The History of the Jews" by Josephus, the letters of Hannah More, and the life of Wilberforce.

Once more it seems that George Eliot was describing herself when she says of Maggie's asceticism " From what you know of her,you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity even into her self-renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity; and so it came to pass that she often lost the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act; she often strove after too high a flight and came down with her poor little half-fledged wings dabbled in the mud."[1]

We have seen asceticism at the height of its glory, and we have now to see it in its decline which paved the way for the second great period of religious development - the reaction against orthodoxy. The mortification of the flesh had failed to bring peace to her soul so that in 1839 she wrote to Miss Lewis: "I think no one feels more difficulty in coming to a decision in controverted matters than myself - I do not mean that I have no preferences; but, however congruous a theory may be with my notions, I cannot find the comfortable repose that others appear to possess after having made their election of a class of sentiments?[2] "Again she writes

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1. Mill on the Floss, Book IV, III.

2. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. I, Chap. I, p. 27.

to her aunt Mrs. Samuel Evans, who was a Methodist clergyman: "My soul seems for weeks together completely denumbed and when I am aroused from this torpid state; the intervals of activity are comparatively short."[1]

Her nature was beginning to cry out against the repression of her feelings. In her first published work, a poem entitled "Farewell", appearing in the Christian Observer, 1839, we see an attempt to picture the joys of heaven which will soon replace the transient joys of earth, but to me the unconscious emphasis seems placed on the joys of earth.

A letter written to Miss Lewis late in 1839 is significant because the large number of scientific quotations shows the growing influence of scientific thought on her mind; and because it expresses her appreciation of Wordsworth. Her reading had greatly broademed out by this time; and she studied scientific works, read Schiller and Lasso, Mrs. Heman's poetry, Don Quixote and the Faery Queen in addition to her religious studies. Years before, in reading Scott's novels, she had been impressed with the idea that morality and religion did not always go hand in hand, and in later years her faith in Christianity had been somewhat shaken because she felt that there was little harmony between the profession and life of most Christians. Then in 1840, her study of "Ancient Christianity" by Isaac Taylor somewhat unsettled her religious views. Taylor asserted that the Christian church of the fourth century should not be regarded as embodying the doctrine and practice of the apostles, and when George Eliot was persuaded that this was the

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1. Ibid., p. 24.

logical point of view, she did not stop until she had carried the argument to the last step.

Thus we see that in the first twenty-one years of her life, George Eliot had been an ardent Evangelical, a more ardent Calvinist and a most zealous ascetic; that for some reason none of these forms of worship had wholly satisfied her; and that scientific research and other study had been preparing her mind for a change soon to take place.

This happened in 1841, when she and her father moved to Coventry and found themselves located next door to a Mrs. Pear. This lady was possessed of a sister and brother-in-law, Mr.. and Mrs Charles Bray, a sister,Miss Sarah Hennell, and a brother, Mr. Charles Hennell, all of whom were to influence George Eliot. These people believed in the interpretation of the Bible along rationalistic lines and in their scientific attitude toward the acceptance of Scripture, she felt that she had at last found a religion to which both and head and heart could conform. Mr. Charles Hennel had written a book entitled, "An Inquiry Concerning Christianity" in which he discarded revelation and the miraculous elements in the Bible and interpreted it from the human standpoint as a book to be entirely explained by Science. The reading of this book and her association with the Brays led her to react against her old beliefs and to adopt the rationalistic viewpoint.

In turning toward this new belief she seems to have been activated by the loftiest motives far in 1842, she wrote to Mrs. Pears - "I wish to be among the ranks of that glorious crusade that is seeking to set Truth's Holy Sepulchre free from a usurped do-

minion."

In December, 1841, her enthusiasm for her hew beliefs had led her to feel that she should stop going to church. This was an unforgivable offense in the eyes of her father and came very nearly bringing about a family rupture; but happily the daughter agreed to outward conformity on this point (as long as her personal convictions were not questioned), and peace was restored. Two years later she explains her decision in this matter by saying that "truth of feeling"[1] is the only universal bond of union and we should "seek to have our feelings in harmony though not in union with those who are often richer in the fruits of faith though not in reason, than ourselves." At another time she wrote to Miss Sara Hennell that she thought it best "not to root up tares where we must inevitably gather all the wheat with them." [2]

As for the new joy and hope that had come into her life with the acceptance of the new religion, we will let quotations from her letters tell the story. In one place she writes, " I am influenced in my own conduct at the present time by far higher considerations and by a nobler idea of duty, than I ever was while I held the Evangelical beliefs." [3] Again she writes to Miss Sara Hennell:"I have been thinking of that most beautiful passage in Luke's gospel - the appearance of Jesus to the disciples at Emmaus.

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1. Cross, J. W. Life of George Eliot Vol. I, Chap. II.
2. Cross, J. W. Life and Letters, Chap. II.
3. Cross, J. W. Life and Letters, Chap. II.

How universal in its significance! The soul has hopelessly followed its Jesus - its impersonation of the highest and best - all in despondency; its thoughts all refuted, its dreams all dissipated! Then comes another Jesus - another, but the same - the same highest and best, only chastened and crucified instead of triumphant - and the soul learns that this is the true way to conquest and glory."[1] At another time she writes "I am entering on a new period of life, which makes me look back on the past as something incredibly poor and contemptible."[2]

We get an idea of the violence of the reaction in the account of this period by Mrs. John Cash, a lifelong friend of George Eliot. She tells us in regard to a religious discussion between Miss Evans and her father that: "There was not only on her part a vehemence of tone, startling in one so quiet, but a crudeness in her objections, an absence of proposed solution of difficulties, ----- which was in strange contrast to the satisfied calm which marked her subsequent treatment of religious differences."[3] Again Mrs. Cash writes:" The impression allowed to remain upon the minds of her friend, for some time after she had made declaration of her heresies, was of her being in a troubled, unsettled state - So great was her simplicity and candour in acknowledging this, and so apparent was her earnest desire for truth, that no hesitation was felt in

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1. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. I, p. 75.

2. Ibid., p. 97.

3. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. II Appendix, p. 137.

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asking her to receive visits from persons - who were judged competent to bring forward the best arguments in favor of orthodox doctrines. One of these was a Baptist minister - said to be well read in divinity, and I remember him as a well read and interesting preacher. After an interview with Miss Evans, meeting my father, he said: "That young lady must have the devil at her elbow to suggest her doubts, for there was not a book that I recommended to her in support of Christian evidences that she had not read." [1]

However,in spite of doubts and exaggerations in the first strong reaction, we find that on the whole, her life was filled with a satisfaction and calm purpose unknown to her before this time. "Those extinct volcanes of one's spiritual life - those eruptions of the intellect and passions which have scattered the lava of doubt and negation over our early faith are only a glorious Himalayan chain, beneath which new valleys of undreamed richness and beauty will spread themselves." [2]

Doubtlessly her perturbed soul needed a period of rest and reflection after the upheavals in belief she had been experiencing, and most happily this came to her, for in 1849, after her father's death she went to Geneva where she spent the next eight months. While there she lived with M. and Mme.D'Albert, a worthy Swiss couple who were in the closest of sympathy with her. Years afterwards she wrote a letter to them revealing something in regard to her feeling at this time. "I think I hardly ever spoke to you of the strong hold evangelical Christianity had on me from the age

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1.Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. II, Appendix. p. 739.

2. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. I, p.99.

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1.Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. II, Appendix. p. 739.

2. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. I, p.99.

of fifteen to two-and-twenty, and of the abundant intercourse I had had with earnest people of various religious sects. When I was at Geneva, I had not yet lost the attitude of antagonism which belongs to the renunciation of any belief; also was very unhappy and in a state of discord and rebellion toward my own lot." [1] She tells us again that she had isolated herself by her studies so that she was cold and lacking in sympathy.[2]

The Geneva period represents then the wilderness days which so often have been the prerequisite of great service; but the reaction against her early beliefs had not yet worn itself out, and George Eliot was not to do her greatest work until this had taken place.

Up to this time in her religious reaction, she had been under the influence of the Brays who were Pantheists and Miss Hennel who was a Theist. Although influenced by Pantheism, George Eliot leaned more toward the latter belief and accepted the Bible as a great Text Book to be interpreted along rationalistic lines. The next six years were to bring her into touch with many other religious philosophies, and just as she had outgrown her early beliefs she was destined also to outgrow the Bray-Hennel influence.

In 1850 she wrote a review of "Mackay's Progress of the Intellect", a book agreeing with her own position at the time as well as that of Miss Hennell. This book expresses the thought that religion is a development "and that for succeeding ages to dream of retaining the spirit along with the forms of the past, is as

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1.Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. I, p. 326.

2. Ibid., p. 109.

futile as the embalming of the dead body in the hope that it may one day be resumed by the living soul. Divine revelation is co-extensive with development and is dependent on invariability of sequence."[1] A few months after writing this, she was asked to become sub-editor of the Westminster Review, and through this position began to meet many influential people.

She became intimate with Herbert Spencer in 1852 and doubtlessly his idea of the inscrutability of the Universe exerted influence over her. In 1854, she published a translation of Feuerbach's "Wesen des Christenthums", with whose effort to humanize theology she was in sympathy. The most important friendship of this period in her London life was with George Henry Lewes. She had become acquainted with this versatile and vivacious writer in 1851 and formed a union with him in 1854. Lewes leaned strongly in his beliefs toward Comte's Positivism, and though he did not accept this philosophy fully he doubtlessly did much to influence George Eliot toward her own inclination for this belief. Still another philosophy that influenced her was Spinoza's "Ethics", of which she made a translation in 1855. Lewes "Life of Goethe" appeared in that year also, and his interest in the German philosopher may have strengthened his wife's deep admiration of Goethe.

Her reaction against Evangelical Christianity came out most clearly in 1855 in an article entitled, "The Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming." She made her objections to Dr. Cumming's faith on the ground of morality and declared that "His system puts the

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1. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. I.

Christian in position of Spectator at a Gladiatorial show of which Satan is a wild beast in the shape of the red dragon and two-thirds of mankind the victims - the whole provided and gotten up by God for the edification of the Saints."[1]

However, in spite of this cutting criticism of Calvinism, George Eliot was beginning to feel that it was much easier to tear down old edifices than to erect new ones and to realize that the lives of many sceptics whom she met did not compare favorably with the objects of their derision. So from the time she began novel writing in 1856,we find the life of George Eliot characterized by a broad spirit of religious tolerance.

In treating this last period of her life, I shall not attempt to manufacture a creed to which I think George Eliot would have given her sanction but will attempt to show that in large measure her sympathies came back to the faith of her childhood; and that sympathetic tolerance of all religious beliefs became the keynote of her life.

It may seem strange to think that the author of the essay on "Evangelical Teaching" could a year later become the sympathetic portrayer of clergymen in "Clerical Scenes", commonly thought to have been written by a clergymen himself. In writing this book, George Eliot had gone back for her inspiration to the associations of her childhood. Her publisher, Mr. Blackwood, in ignorance of the author wrote the following words: "I hate anything of a sneer

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1. Eliot, George, Miscellaneous Essays, New York, p. 129.

at religious feeling as cordially as I despise anything like cant amd I should think this author is of the same way of thinking." [1] Then in her next novel, " Adam Bede", we have the saintly Methodist preacher, Dinah Morris, as the instrument of saving grace; and we are given a most kindly picture of Methodism.

In 1857, George Eliot wrote to Miss Sara Hennell: "I am more inclined to think that I shall admire your book because you are suspected of having given undue preponderance to the Christian argument: for I have a growing conviction that we may measure true moral and intellectual culture, by the comprehension and veneration given to all forms of thought and feeling which have influenced large masses of mankind - and of all intolerance, the tolerance calling itself, philosophical is the most odious to me". [2]

In 1859, she wrote to M. D'Albert in a letter from which I have previously quoted: "Ten years of experience have wrought great changes in that inward self. I have no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves; on the contrary, I have a sympathy with it that predominates over all argumentative tendencies. I have not returned to dogmatic Christianity - to the acceptance of any set of doctrines as a creed - a superhuman revelation of the unseen - but I see in it the highest expression of the religious sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind, and I have the profounded interest in the inward life of sincere Christians in all

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1. Cross, J. W. Life and Letters , Vol.I, p. 213.

2. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. I, p.220.

ages. Many things that I should have argued against ten years ago, I now feel myself too ignorant, and too limited in moral sensibility to speak of with confident disapprobation. On that question of our future existence to which you allude, I have undergone the sort of change I have just indicated, although my most rooted conviction is that the immediate object and the proper sphere of all our highest emotions are our struggling fellow-men in this earthly existence."[1] In line with this same thought she wrote to Miss Hennell in 1860 that she considered Christianity "A grand advance in the moral development of the race".[2]

The one thing against which George Eliot's truth loving nature cried out was the glossing over of painful facts with a veneer of falsehood, and it was this tendency in orthodoxy that she objected to most strongly. The quotation from her letters and books seem to show that her heart was longing to come back to her early beliefs, but intellectual honesty forbade the return. She wrote to Madame Bodichon in 1860. "As for the forms and ceremonies I feel no regret that any should turn to them for comfort if they can find comfort in them; sympathetically I enjoy them myself. But I have faith in the working out of higher possibilities than the Catholic or any other church has presented; and those who have strength to wait and endure are bound to accept no formula which their whole souls - their intellect as well as their emotion - do not embrace with entire reverence. The "highest calling and election" is to do without opium, and live through all our pain with conscious,

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1. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. I, p. 326.

2. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 383.

clear-eyed endurance".[1] Again she writes to Mrs .Bray "Life, though a good to men on the whole, is a doubtful good to many, and to some not a good at all. To my thought, it is a source of constant mental distortion to make the denial of this a part of religion - to go on pretending things are better than they are. To me early death takes aspect of salvation, although I feel, too, that those who live and suffer may sometimes have the greater blessedness of being a salvation". [2] She wrote in another place "It seems to me pre-eminently desirable that we should learn not to make our personal comfort a standard of truth[3]"and terms herself "an enemy to make - believe about the human lot."[4].

She was no friend of negative propagandism in her latter days as a rather indignant letter to Madame Bodichon most clearly reveals. "Pray don't ever ask me again not to rob a man of his religious belief, as if you thought my mind tended to such robbery. I have too profound a conviction of the efficacy that lies in all sincere faith, and the spiritual blight that comes with no faith to have any negative propagandism in me. In fact, I have very little sympathy with Freethinkers as a class, and have lost all interest in mere antagonism to religious doctrines. I care only to know if possible, the lasting meaning that lies in all religious doctrine from the beginning till now."[5] Again she said: "whatever

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1. Ibid., p. 396.
2. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 460.
3. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 496.
4. Ibid., p. 563.
5. Ibid., p. 429.

else my growth may have been, it has not been towards irreverence and needy rejection of what other minds can give me."[1]

Her willingness to learn from all religions may be illustrated in her sympathetic study of the Jew, seen in Daniel Deronda. Her belief in the permanent value of all great service to humanity is shown in her postivist poem, "Oh may I join the Choir Invisible" in which she teaches the philosophy that:

"The Greatest gift the hero leaves his race ,
Is to have been a hero."

She had come to believe that difficulties belonged to every system of thinking and that the aim of life should be to find the one, least incomplete. Mr. Cross says that she was so imbued with the scientific spirit of the age that she could not conceive of any religious formula,yet developed, as self sufficient. She called herself neither an optimist nor a pessimist but a meliorist; and in this last stage of her religious experience in which the optimism of her heart was neutralized by the pessimism of the more sombre beliefs her intellect confirmed, perhaps this is the most fitting term for her belief. In closing the account of this period, I shall use two more quotations which express to me her beautiful spirit of toleration and openness to truth.

"All the great religions of the world, historically considered, are rightly the objects of deep reverence and sympathy - they are the record of spiritual struggles, which are the types of our own. This is to me pre-eminently true of Hebrewism and Chris-

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1. Cross, Life and Letters , Vol. II, p. 466.

tianity, on which my own youth was nourished. And in this sense I have no antagonism towards any religious belief, but a strong outflow of sympathy. Every community met to worship the highest Good (which is understood to be expressed by God) carries me along in its main current; and if there were not reasons against my following such an inclination, I should go to church or chapel, constantly for the sake of the delightful emotions of fellowship which come over me in religious assemblies - the very nature of such assemblies being the recognition of a binding belief or spiritual law, which is to lift us into willing obedience, and save us from the slavery of unregulated passion or impulse."[1] Then in writing to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1874, she asks: "Will you not agree with me that there is one comprehenisve Church whose fellowship consists in the desire to purify and ennoble life, and where the best members of all narrower churches may call themselves brother and sister in spite of differences?" [2]

I have attempted to show the broad curve of George Eliot's religious experience in its first period of over-heated orthodoxy; in its subsequent time of re-action; and in its final period of tolerance for all creeds with a deep yearning after the hope and faith of her early Christian beliefs. I feel that hers was a deeply religious nature, characterized by an unsatiable desire to know the truth, the tragedy of her religious experience lying in the fact that her wonderful intellect, nourished by almost boundless learning could not entirely satisfy the longing of her heart.

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1. Cross, Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 610.
2. Cross, Life and Letters , Vol. II, p. 624.

Chapter III

CARDINAL NEWMAN

The wave of rationalism in nineteenth century England which made so deep an impress on the life of George Eliot was fraught with great significance for John Henry Newman. In taking up the study of his religious experience, we find that he, too, was placed amidst the currents of scepticism as she had been, but with very different reactions towards them. I shall attempt, then, to show, as far as possible, how the innate tendencies of Newman's nature led him steadily on towards his decisions in periods of crisis and his final acceptance of Catholicism as the only bulwark against scepticism.

George Moore tells us that Newman was always a Catholic, and in large part accepting this hypothesis, I shall try to show that his religious experience consisted in a gradual development of early conceptions and the gradual subjugation of sceptical tendencies, rather than in any radical changes of belief. In tracing this development, however, I shall lay special stress on his conversion in 1816; his illness in 1833, preceding the Oxford movement; and his final decision to go over to the church of Rome.

In the first place, then, let us make a study of the tendencies which Newman exhibited in his early childhood, the unconscious years of development which preceded his conversion in 1816. He tells us in the Apologia[1] that he was brought up in the church

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1. Newman, Apologia, p. 1.

of England with a perfect knowledge of the catechism and delight for reading the Bible, but with no knowledge of Catholicism. In view of this later fact, the following quotations seem especially interesting. He says: "I used to wish the Arabian Knights were true: my imagination ran on unknown influences, on magical powers, and talismans. . . .I thought life might be a dream, or I an Angel, and all this world a deception, my fellow-angels by a playful device concealing themselves from me, and deceiving me with the semblance of a material world."[1] Again he writes: "I was very superstitious, and for some time previous to my conversion used constantly to cross myself on going into the dark."[2] In addition to this vein of mysticism in his nature, he had an inborn love of imagery which the following instance reveals. He says, "I had once been into Warwick Street Chapel, with my father, ... all that I bore away from it was the recollection of a pulpit and a preacher and a boy swinging a censer."[3] At the age of ten, he drew the figure of a cross and rosary as the frontispiece of his first book of verse. These facts show the powerful appeal which mysticism and imagery, elements given a large place in the Catholic church, made to him in his childhood. Again Newman shows early symptoms of the sceptical temperament which formed such an important aspect of his character. He tells us: "When I was fourteen, I read Paine's Tracts against

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1. Newman, Apologia, p. 2.
2. Ibid, p. 2 .
3. Ibid, p. 2.

the Old Testament, and found pleasure in thinking of the objections which were contained in them. Also I read some of Hume's Essays; and perhaps that on miracles. Also, I recollect copying out some French verses, perhaps Voltaires, in denial of the immortality of the soul, and saying to myself something like "How dreadful, but how plausible."[1]

At the age of fifteen, he was converted through Calvinistic influences and we shall attempt now to get at the real significance of this conversion by showing that it was a normal phenomenon in his spiritual growth much more in accord with Catholic than Calvinistic ideas. William James[2] tells us that conversion is a normal adolescent phenomenon in which the child passes into wider intellectual and spiritual maturity,and Newman was being led through this stage of his life by Calvinists, yet was not being converted in the sense which they used the word.

He tells us in the "Apologia": "I fell under the influences of a definite creed, and received into my intellect impressions of dogma, which, through God's mercy, have never been effaced or obscured."[3] He felt more certain than that he had hands and feet, that his conversion would last into the next life, and that he was elected to eternal glory. He continues in his

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1. Newman, Apologia, p. 3.
2. James, William. Variety of Religious Experiences, Chap. IV.
3. Newman, Apologia, p. 4.

account: "I believe that it had some influence on my opinions, in the direction of those childish imaginations which I have already mentioned, viz., in isolating me from the objects which surrounded me, in confirming me in my mistrust of the reality of material phenomena, and making me rest in the thought of two and two only absolutely and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator; for while I considered myself predestined to salvation, my mind did not dwell upon others, as fancying them simply passed over, not predestined to eternal death. I only thought of the mercy to myself."[1] Miss Mozley tells us that: "He was sensible that he had ever been wanting in those special Evangelical experiences which, like the grip of the hand or other prescribed signs of a secret society, are the sure token of a member."[2] He did not pass through the "stages of conviction of sin, terror, despair, news of the free and full salvation, apprehension of Christ, sense of pardon, assurance of salvation, joy and peace, and so on to final perseverance," and records in a memorandum for 1821: "I speak of conversion with great diffidence, being obliged to adopt the language of books. For my own feelings, as far as I remember, were so different from any account I have ever read that I dare not go by what may be an individual case. . . . . My own feelings were not violent, but a returning to, a renewing of, principles, under the power of the Holy Spirit, which I had already felt, and in a measure acted on when

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1. Newman, Apologia, p.4.

2. Mozley, Anne. Letters and Correspondence of J. H. Newman, p. 108.

young."[1] Miss Mozley insists that: "Much as he owed to the Evangelical, so it was he never had been a genuine Evangelical. He had, indeed, been converted by it to a spiritual life, and so far his experience bore witness to its truth; but he had not been converted in that special way which it laid down as imperative, but so plainly against rule as to make it very doubtful in the eyes of normal Evangelicals whether he had really been converted at all."[2]

Newman's conversion then is perhaps best explained in the words which he uttered many years later when he spoke of it as the time when he became religious.[3] It would seem on analyzing his state of mind that he had become filled with the certitude that there is an all-powerful God and that this God had elected him to eternal salvation. This belief, known in theology as the doctrine of election, Newman tells us in the "Grammar of Assent,"[4] may be held by a Calvinist in such a way that he may be able still to hold it as a Catholic. His conversion then from the positive viewpoint does not seem to have been Calvinistic, and from the negative viewpoint, does not seem to have had anything in it opposed to Catholicism.

From the time of his conversion in 1816 up until 1833, Newman's life was spent mostly at Oxford, first as a student, then as a fellow, and later as a curate of charges near there. Through-

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1. Mozley, Anne. Letters and Correspondence of J.H.Newman, p. 108.
2. Ibid, p. 107.
3. Ward, Wilfrid, Life, Vol. I, p. 139.
4. Newman, Grammar of Assent, p. 251.

out this period then, I shall attempt to show the Catholic tendencies manifested as he passed out of Calvinism into the church of England, and made further developments in his theological beliefs.

He tells us in the Apologia that soon after his conversion the "main Catholic doctrine of the warfare between the city of God and the powers of darkness"[1] was impressed upon him by Law's "Serious Call." Far more important than this, however, was his study of Joseph Milner's Church History, which led to his becoming enamored with the early fathers and implanted the desire in him to make a more detailed study of antiquity.

Another phase of Newman's character which tended to incline him toward Rome was his asceticism, which may be seen in the conviction which came to him soon after his conversion that it was God's will for him to lead a single life. This unusual decision for a boy of fifteen seems to me to be rather striking evidence of the ascetic vein in Newman, which we see later in his renewed vows of celibacy in 1824 along with the decision of that time to be a missionary. We will take further note of this asceticism later on in his life.

The mysticism evidenced in boyhood may be seen in the youth of twenty, for he tells us: "I dreamed a spirit came to me and discoursed about the other world. Among other things it said that it was absolutely impossible for the reason of man to understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and in vain to argue about it; but that everything in another world was so very, very plain

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1. Apologia, p. 6.

that there was not the slightest difficulty about it."[1]

In 1822, quite in keeping with what we have shown, Newman gave up his Calvinism without a struggle, and was led by Dr. Hawkins to accept the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration. This belief brought home to him "the Catholic doctrine that forgiveness of sin is conveyed to us, not simply by imputation, but by the implanting of a habit of grace."[2] Dr. Hawkins also taught him to believe in the doctrine of tradition to which he had sympathetically been presupposed for many years, while study of Butler's Analogy led him to fuller conviction of the unreality of material phenomena, as well as belief in Probability as the guide of life.

Meanwhile, his sceptical nature was being developed under Dr. Whately, with whom he studied logic,and in 1828 he tells us that he was rapidly coming to prefer intellectual excellence to moral, but was awakened by illness and the death of his sister Mary.[3] Newman had come to fear that pure reason would lead him to Atheism and he turned fearfully from logic to the study of antiquity. In 1828, he began to study the history of the church fathers with great earnestness and devotion, and entered more completely into the enthronement of antiquity as the goddess of truth.

Among beliefs which he had come to adhere to in these years, belief in the church as a substantive body and his medieval

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1. Mozley, Letters and Correspondence, Vol. I, p. 48.
2. Apologia, p. 8.
3. Mozley, Letters and Correspondence, Vol. I, p. 154.

conception of angels seem most strikingly Catholic. He tells us that he regarded angels as the forces of the visible world, and "considered them as the real causes of motion, light and life, and of those elementary principles of the physical universe, which, when offered in their developments to our senses, suggest to us the notion of cause and effect, and of what are called the laws of nature."[1] He believed, too, in evil spirits.

In addition to these tendencies, by 1832 Newman's study of antiquity had led him to believe[2] in the Catholic church of the apostles and through the influence of Hurrell Froude, he was coming to look more kindly toward Rome. Newman says: "He taught me to look with admiration towards the church of Rome, and in the same degree to dislike the Reformation. He fixed deep in me the idea of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and he led me gradually to believe in the real presence."[3] Thus, when Newman started abroad with Froude in December, 1832, his feelings toward Rome had come to be those of sad regret, although his convictions of her depravity led him still to speak out strongly against her.

In 1833, Newman wrote some lines of poetry at Rome which express his feeling. They begin:

"For sadder musing on the traveller falls
At sight of thee, O Rome."[4]

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1. Apologia, p. 28.
2. Ibid, p. 31.
3. Ibid, p. 25.
4. Mozley, Correspondence and Letters, p. 317.

Again he writes: "As to the Roman Catholic system, I have ever detested it so much that I cannot detest it more by seeing it, but to the Catholic system, I am more attached than ever, and quite love the little monks of Rome."[1] Again he cries out: "Oh, that Rome were not Rome! but I seem to see as clear as day that a union with her is impossible."[2] And sorrowfully adds: "Yet the dust of the apostles lies there, and the present clergy are their descendants." In spite of this mingled admiration and sorrow, he was strongly repelled by the illiteracy and immorality of both people and priests.

Then in 1833, when Newman was separated from his companions and traveling in Sicily, accompanied by native servants, he fell victim to a terrible fever and for weeks hovered between life and death. Throughout those days of suffering, he was possessed of an undying conviction that he would recover in order to perform a work that God had for him to do. In the midst of his delirium he was tortured by thoughts of his own sin and unworthiness, but kept always repeating to himself, "I have not sinned against light."[3] At last he recovered and rose from his bed to write those memorable lines of "Lead Kindly Light."

Let us see then the significance of this experience, which may perhaps be regarded as the great turning point of his

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1. Mozley, Letters and Correspondence, p. 332.
2. Ibid, p. 338.
3. Ibid, p. 365.

life. For years Newman had been developing characteristics and beliefs that tended to make him at least sympathetically inclined towards Rome, but always he had been drifting. Mr. Ward tells us that Newman never made any effort to fashion the course of his life, but always waited on Providence.[1] His illness aroused him to feel that he must turn and strike toward a definite goal and on his return to England in 1833, he threw himself heart and soul into the Oxford movement.

Newman says concerning this experience: "I seemed to see more and more my utter hollowness. I began to think of all my principles and feel they were mere intellectual deductions from one or two admitted truths."[2] He felt that he had been "as a pane of glass which transmits heat, being cold itself."[3] The newborn desire to fill his mission in life and submit to God's will may perhaps best be exemplified by quoting the hymn which sprang out of this experience.

"Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home—
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene,—one step enough for me.

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1. Ward, Wilfrid, The Life of John H. Cardinal Newman, p. 15.
2. Ibid, p. 54.
3. Ibid, p. 54.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on.
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone;
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile."[1]

Newman's mission soon formed itself, on his return, into an effort to Catholicize the church of England. He with others had come to believe that the Catholic church had originally been the true church, and that Protestant churches had been wrong in disavowing allegiance to it, while the Anglican church, which sought the via media must be brought back to a position more positively Catholic. Meanwhile, the liberal wing of the established church were seeking to make it more protestant, and hence Miss Mozley tells us that the date of Newman's return to England was a most critical time in the life of the church of England.[2]

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1. Mozley, Letters and Correspondence, p. 359.
2. Ibid, p. 379.

Newman joined the little group made up of Froude, Keble, William Palmer, Arthur Perceval and Mr. Hugh Rose and throwing all his energies into this movement, began writing tracts and making every effort to rouse the clergy. He tells us: "I had the consciousness that I was employed in that work which I had been dreaming about, and which I felt to be so momentous and inspiring. I had a supreme confidence in our cause: we were upholding the primitive Christianity which was delivered for all time by the early teachers of the church, and which was registered and attested in the Anglican formularies and by the Anglican divines. It would be in fact a second Reformation—a better Reformation, for it would be a return not to the sixteenth century but to the seventeenth."[1] Newman's confidence in their cause was based on his firm conviction "that the Apostolical form of doctrine was essential and imperative, and its grounds of evidence impregnable."[2]

From the beginning of the Tractarian movement, Newman's progress was straight towards Rome. While at the first, his deep conviction[3] that the Anglican church was founded on the teachings of the Fathers made him sure that his study of antiquity would not lead him to Rome, he really was advancing there step by step, and it was only necessary that he should awaken to this fact. When we look at the theological platform[4] which he gives us in

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1. Apologia, p. 43.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, p. 48.

the Apologia, we see more clearly the Catholic tendencies of the movement. In the first place, Newman adhered absolutely to the principle of dogma as opposed to the anti-dogmatic principle of liberalism. Secondly, he believed in definite religious teachings based on this foundation of dogma; viz. "a visible church with sacraments and rites which are the channels of invisible grace." This was a system which demanded absolute obedience to bishops. Then in regard to his attitude toward Rome he tells us that his sympathetic allegiance was already hers.[1] Her zealous maintenance of the rule of celibacy and her faithful agreements were strongly in favor of Rome, so that Newman tells us: "Thus, I learned to have tender feelings towards her; but still my reason was not affected at all. My judgment was against her, when viewed as an institution, as truly as it ever had been."[2]

So Newman set to work to strengthen and establish the Anglican position; to bring the church of England into harmony with the early Catholic church. Already he was a Catholic, only separated from the church of Rome because of his conviction of her corruptions. Gradually his articles and tracts began to be held in question as pro-Catholic and in defense of his position, Newman stated, "The articles do not oppose Catholic teaching; they but partially oppose Roman dogma, they for the most part oppose the dominant errors of Rome."[3] We can trace through his tracts the steadily growing conviction that Rome was right, and when Tract 90 was published in 1839, Newman's views had carried him so far

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1. Apologia, p. 54.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, p. 79.

that he was obliged to resign from the movement. This was far from meaning that he had forsaken the Anglican church, however, but only that he was more firmly convinced that the only hope for her lay in a new birth of ancient religion, and that his views had already carried him farther than was pleasing to Anglican bishops. So Newman set out with more earnestness than ever to establish the authority of the via media and now comes the final struggle which ended with his decision to go over to Rome.

Newman turned then to antiquity and in his one desire to be honest and seek the truth, he pitted the opposing forces against each other. In its formal creed the Anglican church was not far from Rome, but from the historical viewpoint, there was wide divergence. "The Anglican said to the Roman: There is but one faith, the Ancient, and you have not kept to it; the Roman retorted: There is but one church, the Catholic, and you are out of it."[1] Soon, however, his study of St. Augustine suddenly pulverized for him the theory of the via media and he tells us, "The thought for the moment had been, 'The church of Rome will be found right after all;' and then it had vanished. My old convictions remained as before."[2] His honest seeking after the truth and his resolution not to be misled by his emotions may be seen in the following quotation from the Apologia: "The one question was, what was I to do? I had to make up my mind for myself, and others could not help me. I determined to be guided, not by

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1. Apologia, p. 196.

2. Ibid, p. 117.

my imagination, but by my reason. . . . . Had it not been for this severe resolve, I should have been a Catholic sooner than I was. . . . . Then I said to myself, Time alone can solve that question. It was my business to go on as usual, to obey those convictions to which I had so long surrendered myself, which still had possession of me, and on which my new thoughts had no direct bearing. That new conception of things should only so far influence me, as it had a logical claim to do so. If it came from above, it would come again; so I trusted, ... I thought of Samuel, before 'he knew the word of the Lord;' and therefore I went, and lay down to sleep again."[1]

Newman could not remain in a state of passivity long though, for once convinced that there could be no basis for the via media, he was left to choose between Catholicism and Atheism, for already he had rejected Protestantism for all time. Still he could not throw over his Anglican allegiance even in 1843 when he retired to Littlemore to fight the matter out to a finish.

This period from 1843-45 was one of intense agitation for Newman. It was terribly hard to throw off the old faith when he was overwhelmed with a sense of his duty to the Anglican church and only too keenly awake to his very great influence over her younger men, especially at Oxford. Then too, in spite of his conviction that the church of England was wrong, he felt that he could not go to Rome because of her corruptions, although she had the apostolical succession, the two prominent sacraments, and the

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1. Apologia, p. 119.

primitive creeds, all of which he accepted. He felt that he was neither Anglican nor Catholic, yet shuddered at the thought of scepticism. Gradually, however, as he faced the issues amidst the peace and quiet of Littlemore, his difficulties were overcome. He came to feel that there was nothing in Catholicism which came between man and his creator. Then he began to feel that the worship of the Virgin Mary, which he had always felt to be one of the worst corruptions of Catholicism, was merely a magnified idea which he had unfairly taken out of its context. By 1845, he saw that historically, the argument was overwhelmingly in favor of Rome, and that the Catholics were formally right and the Anglicans formally wrong. So Newman concluded that whatever her corruptions might be, the only haven for a true Christian must lie in the church of Rome and he took the momentous step of embracing the Catholic faith.

In the Grammar of Assent, we read: "When . . . we are told that a man has changed from one religion to another, the first question which we have to ask,is, have the first and the second religions nothing in common?"[1] Then Newman goes on to say, "There are few religions which have no points in common; and these, whether true or false, when embraced with an absolute conviction, are the points on which changes take place." It is evident that this is the light in which Newman viewed his own religious experience and that in coming to Catholicism he felt that he was not turning from his life-long convictions but was rather

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1. Newman, Grammar of Assent, p. 245.

following them to their logical conclusions. Perhaps we could not explain his feeling in regard to this better than by quoting again his own words: "It is by the light of those particular truths, contained respectively in the various religions of men, and by our certitudes about them, which are possible wherever these truths are found, that we pick our way, slowly perhaps, but surely, into the one religion which God has given, taking our certitudes with us, not to lose, but to keep them more securely, and to understand and love their objects more perfectly."[1]

The church of Rome was not, however, the only goal that Newman had the capability to reach. Always, he had a strain of scepticism in his nature which has sometimes occasioned the accusation that he makes out as good a case for scepticism as for Catholicism in his works. His words as a boy in regard to the works of Voltaire, "How dreadful, but how plausible," perhaps give the best key to his temperament. Time and again when his logical nature was on the point of gaining mastery over him, he sprang back in horror from the precipice of atheism. Perhaps this is one of the strongest reasons for his going over to Rome, for the Catholic church has very often held a strong fascination for the sceptical minded who have sought refuge in her absolute authority as a haven of rest.

Undoubtedly though, the Catholic church satisfied the love of imagery and form as well as the element of mysticism in his nature. Then too, his peculiar love of dogma attracted him

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1. Newman, Grammar of Assent, p. 249.

toward Rome, while, after accepting Catholic premises, he had endless opportunity to satisfy his logical powers in the building up of complex systems of theology—which was no doubt pleasurable exercise for him even if logic had become the servant of religion. Then another marked tendency of Newman's nature lay in the asceticism already noted. Perhaps one of the strongest evidences[1] of this was the need he ever felt for something definite to obey, but from early childhood, we have seen other signs of this in his vows of celibacy and disavowals of worldly pleasure. Wm. James tells us that "The Roman church has in its incomparable fashion, collected all the motives towards asceticism together and so codified them that anyone wishing to pursue Christian perfection may find a practical system mapped out for him in any one of a number of ready-made manuals,"[2] so perhaps Newman found in Catholicism the best outlet for his ascetic longings.

That this culmination in his religious life brought him happiness may be gleaned from the following lines from the Apologia written in 1864. "I have been in perfect peace and contentment; I have never had one doubt. I was not conscious to myself, on my conversion, of any change, intellectual or moral, wrought in my mind. I was not conscious of firmer faith in the fundamental truths of Revelation, or of more self-command; I had not more fervour; but it was like coming into port after a rough sea; and my happiness on that score remains to this day without interruption."[3]

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1. James, William, Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 312.
2. Ibid, p. 304.
3. Apologia, p. 238.

In spite of the evident sincerity of the preceding words, Mr. Newman's Catholic biographer, Mr. Wilfrid Ward, has not failed to bring out that there were innumerable misunderstandings and disappointments in his life as a Catholic. One reason for this was that Newman had idealized the Catholic church as the church of the early fathers and consequently suffered some disillusionments when he came into contact with the church of the nineteenth century. Then again, in spite of his marked Catholic characteristics, protestantism had left its indelible marks upon him, while the very fact that he had fought out his religious difficulties and come to Rome from a different faith made it hard for him completely to realize the Catholic ideal of submission to authority. Sarolea says that Newman was always protestant in spirit for he was "ever ready to protest in the name of conscience."[1] The facts, too, that he had been idolized at Oxford and that the external events of his protestant life had been conducive to happiness, doubtlessly made it hard for him to take a subordinate place in a different church, when he was nearly fifty years old. The Catholic church did not fail to awaken to the merit of this illustrious son, who had adopted her faith, however, for late in life John Henry Newman was made Cardinal of Rome.

I feel very sure, then, that whatever **were** the disappointments in his life as a Catholic, Newman's sincere seeking after truth brought him to a solution which gave peace to his soul. The forces of his nature placed in the whirlpool of the religious

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1. Sarolea, Charles, Cardinal Newman, p. 132.

tendencies of his day reacted in a way that may seem misguided to us, yet it is impossible to doubt that he acted ever in resolute obedience to the voice of conscience. The light that came to him unquestionably would have meant darkness to many others, but for Newman it brought triumphant victory over the powers of darkness. So to the purity and religious devotion of Newman we pay all honor as to one who fought the good fight and finished his course, led on by the unflickering gleam of the "kindly light."

Chapter IV

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

The religious experience of Alfred Lord Tennyson is of interest to the student of the nineteenth century not only for the light that it throws upon the life of a great poet but because, without doubt, he was the chief poetic voice in interpreting the the human experience of the age in which he lived. No one else has expressed so clearly and vividly the contest between faith and knowledge, which the advance of science had precipitated on his generation, and no one else succeeded as did he in reconciling old beliefs with new. In striking contrast to the experiences of George Eliot and Cardinal Newman, Tennyson's struggle with religious problems did not lead him away from the faith of his Church of England fathers. It is with special interest then that we turn to examine the different periods of his religious experience: the first years of unchallenged faith; the long struggle with doubt, which came after the death of his dearest friend; and the gradual solution of his difficulties crowned by the re-birth of faith.

During the first twenty-four years of Tennyson's life, it would seem that the poet accepted the religious faith of his parents in simplicity and reverence, apparently unmoved by the doubts and difficulties of his age. This spirit especially marks his life for the first nineteen years for in the years following his entrance to Cambridge, although outwardly showing no change toward the old faith, his mind was being stored with ideas and impressions which later served as fuel for the flames of doubt.

Until the year 1828, with the exception of four unhappy years in the grammar school at Louth, Tennyson's life was spent at the rectory in Somersley. We shall try to show that these years were marked by careful religious instruction; the fostering of reverence and mysticism through companionship with nature and the seclusion of his life; and a quickening interest in the study of science.

The poet's father was a man who had felt no real calling for the ministry but one who held theological tenets considerably in advance of his age and was possessed of a high sense of duty. His mother, Anne Thackeray Ritchie tells us, was "intensely, fervently religious as a poet's mother should be"[1]. It is to be expected then that Alfred received careful training along religious lines and as he made no intimacies in boyhood outside his own family, there were no influences to offset his home training. The "Poems by Two Brothers", to which Alfred contributed a number of poems written between his fifteenth and seventh years, contain many scriptural phrases and allusions, which show great familiarity with the Bible. This early habit of Bible-study, he continued all through his life.

The Tennyson family had little communication with the outside world, getting mail only two or three times a week, and the young poet had opportunities for solitude and for untrammeled communion with nature, both of which contributed to his religious growth. Long hours spent alone in his father's library and solitary walks over the hills and meadows of Lincoln helped to develop in his religious life a deep sense of awe and reverence as well as

1. Ritchie, Anne L. Records of Tennyson, Ruskin, and Browning, p.13

a feeling of mysticism. The following prayer, which has been found written out in his boyish handwriting, exhibits something of this, "O Lord God Almighty high above all height, omniscient and omnipresent, whose lifetime is eternity, will thou condescend to behold from the throne of thy inexpressible majesty the work of Thine own hands kneeling before thee? Thou art the God of Heaven and of Earth - Thou hast created the immeasurable Sea- Thou has laid the foundations of the world that it should not be moved forever. Thou givest and Thou takest life. Thou destroyest and Thou renewest. Blessed be thy name forever."[1]

An old neighbor of the Tennysons' gives an interesting account of the young poet's wandering through the country lost in deep thought. "Many a time has Alfred been met miles away from home, hatless and quite absorbed, sometimes only realizing his situation when his further journeying was prevented by the sea." It is not surprising that such a youth should have early come to feel the reality of the unseen and show himself to be something of a mystic. He said in later life: "Dim mystic sympathies with tree and hill reach far back into childhood".[2] In one of his early poems, "Sublimity"[3] we find evidences of this in expressions such as "wild heavenly voices","more than mortal music"and " solemn rustling of cherubic winds". Again, in the poem "And ask ye why these Sad Tears Stream?" we have the stanza:

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1. Tennyson, Hallam- A Memoir of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Vol. p. 15.
2. Memoir, Vol. I, p. 171.
3. Poems by Two Brothers, p. 103.

"I saw her mid the realms of light
In everlasting radiance gleaming;
Co-equal with the seraphs bright
Mid thousand thousand angels beaming."[1]

Many of these early poems deal with death and are apt to be written in a Byronic strain. They show however the unquestioning faith of a boy, who, without knowing anything of its meaning, can write glib lines on death and immortality. "The Dying Christian" utters the following lines:

"There is a hope - not frail as that
Which rests on human things -----
The hope of an immortal state,
And with the King of Kings!"[2]

One can scarcely feel that a soul that had known great sorrow would have written the verse just quoted or the following lilting lines of the "The Dying Man to His Friends".

"Fare thee well! for I am parting
To the realms of endless bliss;
Why is thus thy full tear starting?
There's a world more bright than this
Though we part 'tis not for ever,
Why that sad and rayless eye?
What though here in grief we sever,

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1. Poems by Two Brothers, p. 100.
2. Ibid., p. 175.

'Tis to meet again on high."[1]

One other thing that it is important to note about his early life, because of its later significance, is his interest in the habits of animals. His son says that this youthful observance of the habits of birds, beasts, ants, and bees led to his serious study of science in later life.[2]

In 1828, Tennyson entered upon his three years at Cambridge where we find him growing into larger intellectual and spiritual insight but, in spite of a growing interest in science, little influenced by the rationalistic and materialistic philosophies with which he came in contact. He maintained his habits of solitude, although he formed many deep and lasting friendships, the most notable among them being of course his intimacy with Arthur Hallam. He resented the low ebb of intellectual life at Cambridge as well as the general air of lethargy and failure to grapple with the problems of the day.

"You that do profess to teach
And teach us nothing, feeding not the heart."[3]

Tennyson was a member of the Society of Apostles which met for the purpose of discussing philosophy and religion, although it is said that he was always a listener, never a participant in the discussions. In this way, he came in touch with the philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Butler, Hume, Bentham, Descartes and Kant[4]

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1. Poems by Two Brothers, p. 233.

2. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir, Vol. I, p. 18.

3. Tennyson, Alfred, In Cambridge University.

4. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir, Vol. I, p. 43.

but he and Hallam remained unsceptical adherents to Christianity. I do not mean that he blindly accepted the theology and dogma of the church, for his keen mind saw the fallacies of many dogmatic assertions and said one concerning a piece of dogma "That's the swift decision of one who sees only half the truth".

In his "Poems chiefly Lyrical," published in 1830, we see his interest in the Spiritual world in such poems as "Supposed Confessions of a Second rate Sensitive Mind" while his mysticism shows itself in the following lines:

"All this hath been before,
All this hath been, I know not when nor where;"[1]

Further evidence of this characteristic may be seen in the record that in 1831, after his father's death, Alfred slept in his bed, earnestly desiring to see his ghost.[2] Fitzgerald writes concerning him at this time: "As he wandered over the wold, or by the brook, he often seemed to be in dreamland, so that one who often saw him then called him a mysterious being, seemingly lifted high above other mortals, and having a power of intercourse with the spirit world not granted to others."

In spite of his interest in science and his propounding of the theory during his college life that the "development of the human body might possibly be traced from the radiated vermicular, molluscous and vertebrate organisms"[3], Tennyson's poetry previous

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1. Tennyson, Alfred, Early Sonnetts.
2. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir , Vol. I, p. 72.
3. Ibid., p. 44.

to 1833 seems singularly free from spiritual conflict, there being as yet no discrepancy for him between science and religion. The simplicity of his faith is perhaps best expressed in the philosophy of those familiar lines published in 1832.

"Howe'sr it be, it seems to me,
'Tis only noble to be good
Kind hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith than Norman blood"[1]

We are now to turn, however, from the somewhat idyllic picture of Tennyson's youth, crowned by its simple faith, to the harsh and bitter challenge which was to shake his soul to its very depths. Not realizing what he wrote, in 1828 he had penned the lines

"Thro' spiritual dark we come
Into the light of spiritual life,"[2]

a striking prophecy of his own future.

In September 1833, like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, word came to Tennyson that his most intimate and best beloved friend, Arthur Hallam while touring the continent with his father, had died very suddenly at Vienna. The shock to Tennyson could not have been greater for the bond between them was unusually strong. Not only had Hallam been his confidante, the great sharerof all his intellectual problems and the chief source of inspiration and encouragement in his poetical efforts but the link between them had been drawn still closer by Hallam's engagement to the poet's sister, Emily.

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1. Tennyson, Alfred, Poems,Lady Clara Vere de Vere
2. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir Vol. I, p. 60.

Dr. Jowett says: "One can hardly conceive the overwhelming impression made on a mind like Tennyson's by the loss of a friend who was more than all the world to him."[1] It was to Tennyson the dividing point between calm trust in the goodness of life and dark despair.

"My blood an even tenor kept,
Till on mine ear this message falls,
That in Vienna's fatal walls
God's finger touched him and he slept".[2]

Stunned by the blow, for months afterwards, his health remained variable and his spirits indifferent".[3] Nor was it a scar that ever healed completely, for we are told that years later he spoke of Arthur Hallam as of one who had died but yesterday.[4]

Hallam's life had indeed been one of unusual promise and all of his contemporaries agree that Tennyson's praise of him, which might seem extravagant to those unfamiliar with his character, is richly merited.

"For can I doubt who knew thee, keen
In intellect, with force and skill
To strive, to fashion, to fulfil --
I doubt not what thou wouldst have been ;"[5]

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1. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir, Vol. II, p. 464.
2. Tennyson, Alfred, Poems In Memoriam Canto LXXXV.
3. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir, Vol. I, p. 138.
4. Weld, Agnes Grace, Glimpses of Tennyson, p. 51.
5. Tennyson, Alfred, In Memoriam.

Gladstone, who knew Hallam at Eton attests to his

"All-comprehensive tenderness,
All-subtilizing intellect".[1]

and says, that even seen through the affectionate eyes of his best friend, Hallam's character and gifted intellect have not been over-emphasized.[2] To Tennyson's sympathetic and affectionate nature then, no earthly loss could have been better designed to try the strength of his, as yet, untested faith.

At first, he felt that there was nothing left to live for and despair clutched at his heart with the question "Were it not better not to be?"[3] His poem "The Two Voices", originally called "The Thoughts of Suicide" and written in 1833, pictures for us his state of mind at that time. The voice of doubt whispers

"Thou art so steeped in misery
Surely 'twere better not to be".

From the midst of dull heartache, reason asserts itself enough to make him feel that this is no adequate solution.

"I said: 'I toil beneath the curse,
But knowing not the universe,
I fear to slide from bad to worse;

' And that in seeking to undo
One riddle, and to find the true,
I knit a hundred others new."

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1. Tennyson, Alfred, In Memoriam, Canto, LXXXV.

2. Tennyson, Alfred, Hallam, Memoir Vol, I, p. 299.

3. Tennyson, Alfred, The Two Voices,

'If all be dark, vague voice', I said,
'These things are wrapt in doubt and dread,
Nor canst thou show the dead are dead."

Oppressed with the inscrutability of the universe, the poet can only tell himself that it is as easy to prove that there is a future life as that there is not, while all his longings are for belief in immortality for

"No life that breathes with human breath
Has ever truly longed for death".[1]

Rather it is"More life, and fuller that I want".[2] The poet can find nothing other than this vague hope, however, with which to answer his doubts and rather than solving them, he stills them temporarily by breathing in the calm beauty of the Sabbath morn and listening to the music of the church bells.

We find then, in the very beginning of our study that even when things looked darkest to him and he was most oppressed by doubt, Tennyson never entirely out himself off from his early faith. He never felt sure that there was no God, no life after death, no basis for happiness, but clung to those beliefs, hoping that they would bear him up, even though he felt them ever on the verge of sinking beneath the black waves of despair. An instinct within him told him that he must go on

"To serve, to seek, to find and not to yield".[3]

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1. Tennyson, Alfred, The Two Voices.
2. Tennyson, -A. The Two Voices.
3. Tennyson, A. Ulysses.

He wrote to Emily Sellwood in 1839, "We must bear or we must die. It is easier perhaps to die but infinitely less noble"[1].

The conflict then was essentially one of intellect versus feelings and until

"That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before."[2]

the re-birth of faith could not come to him. Turning then to his poems and letters, especially to "In Memoriam" which Tennyson acknowledged as the most complete expression of his inner life[3], we shall try to show how one

"Who touch'd a jarring lyre at first,
But ever strove to make it true,"[4]

succeeded in so doing.

The three forces which seem to me the most vital factors in determining the outcome of his struggle were those which we have already noted in his youth; his deep reverence, the mysticism of his nature; and his great interest in science.

His reverence, which made him feel it almost wrong to speak God's name, often referring to him as the "Nameless One"[5], kept him from rash and daring assertions which are apt to attend newly awakened

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1. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir, Vol. I, p. 169.
2. In Memoriam, Preface.
3. Ibid, Canto, XCVI.
4. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir.
5. Ibid, Vol. II, p. 300.

scepticism. It influenced him too, in making him feel that he must give the utmost consideration to the claims of the old beliefs, even when sorrow had made them seem utterly inadequate. Had it not been for his mysticism, however, which kept him from being satisfied with outward truths, his truth-loving nature might have been satisfied with the teachings of science. But although he could not accept a religion which did not harmonize, with it, science alone could bring him no solution of his difficulties.

In the anguish of the first weeks after Hallam's death the blow, which he says crushed

"And stunned me from my power to think
And all my knowledge of myself,"[1]

blinded him to all that lay ahead in life except the dark shadow, which had summoned Hallam and one day would beckon to him. Yet even then, he could not wish himself a lower form of animal life

"To whom a conscience never wakes"[2]

He had tested the joys of love and not even the bitterness of present pain could make him wish he had not known them. To quote his words:

"I hold it true, what e'er befall;
I feel it when I sorrow most;
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all."[3]

The sweetness of the love, which he had known, made it seem impossible that death ends all for, were that true, the poet felt

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1. In Memoriam Canto XVI.

2. Ibid., Canto XXVII.

3. In Memoriam, Canto XXVII.

(see 56-A)

that there could be no love. Immortality was for him so sweet a thought, that even were it proven false, he felt that there might be value in the delusion.[1] His mind dwelt longingly also on the idea of revealed truth which we have in Christ but he could find no basis for faith. Hope came only with

"Short swallow-flights of song, that dip
Their wings in tears and skim away"[2]

The only ground for faith which he could find was that there is an unquenchable longing in the human breast for the highest things.

"O,yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defect of doubt, and taints of blood;"[3]

To this vague hope, doubt brings the challenge, " How can you prove the unfathomable?"

"Behold we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last - far off- at last, to all,
And every winter change to Spring.

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1. In Memoriam, Canto XXXV.
2. Ibid, Canto XLVIII.
3. Ibid., Canto, LIV.

So runs my dream; but what am I?
An infant crying in the night ;
An infant crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry."[1]

Thus far, he can feel no clue as to where the key to all mysteries and all knowledge is lodged. It cannot be in nature,

"For nature is one with rapine, a harm no
preacher can heal",[2]

and has little regard for the individual

"So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life,"[3]

as he reflects still further, he finds a fallacy even in the thought that nature has consideration for the type.

"So careful of the type? but no
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries, 'a thousand types are gone;
I care for nothing, All shall go."

Thou makest thine appeal to me:
I bring to life, I bring to death;
The spirit it does but mean the breath:
I know no more'". [4]

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1. In Memoriam, Canto LIV.
2. Maud.
3. In Memoriam, LV.
4. In Memoriam, Canto, LV.

So turning from nature as a source from which could come no comfort, Tennyson's soul passed into the depths of anguish as he groped for some intimation that Hallam's soul had not passed into deep oblivion. At times, just for a moment, mystic hints flash through his grief-stricken mind and

"The Glory of the Sum of things
Will flash along the chords and go".[1]

These vague intimations led him to feel that perhaps were his life purer and truer, he might gain insight into enternal truths and that he might even be able to hold communion with the dead. As yet, though, he can feel no grounds for assurance that this would be true.

At length one night so calm and still, that, outdoors on the lawn, the tapers burned unwaveringly, Tennyson, left alone out beneath the stars, felt the hunger in his heart for his lost friend unbearable. To gain some little consolation, he read again "the noble letters of the dead".

"So word by word, and line by line,
The dead man touch'd me from the past,
And all at once it seem'd at last
The living soul was flash'd on mine."[2]

From this moment of mystic insight, in spite of the return of doubts, he feels the certainty of faith. He can see now that

"There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds."[3]

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1. In Memoriam, Canto, LXXVII.

2. Ibid., Canto, XCV.
3. Ibid., Canto, XCVI.

He recalls that Hallam too had fought with doubt, refusing to "make his judgment blind," and had made a "stronger faith his own". He feels now that love gives a conclusive answer to doubt and reaches his decision:

"I cannot understand; I love."[1]

With decision faith flooded back into the poet's heart and he could sing

"Ring out the grief that saps the mind

as well as

"The faithless coldness of the Times",

and end his prayer with

"Ring in the valiant man and free
The larger heart, the kindlier hand
Ring out the darkness of the land
Ring in Christ that is to be ".[2]

In reaching this decision that love and faith are the all conclusive arguments against doubt, Tennyson did not for a moment cast off his belief in science but he felt that

"Science moves but slowly, slowly
Creeping on from point to point" and that
"Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers,"[3]

Even at the highest point of development, knowledge and science,

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1. In Memoriam , Canto XCVII.

3. In Memoriam, Canto CVI.

3. Locksley Hall.

can not go far enough,

"For Knowledge is the swallow on the lake
That sees and stirs the surface shadows there
But never yet hath dipt into the abysm". [1]

Although Evolution has done much to explain the forms of life and has taught us to

"Move upward, working out the beast
And let the ape and tiger die," [2]

toput our trust in knowledge is a snare and delusion for

"Half-grown as yet, a child and vain
She cannot fight the fear of death
What is she out from love and faith,
But some wild Pallas from the brain". [3]

It is true that:

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new"

Yet the poet sees an eternal conflict with

"Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good,
And Reversion ever dragging Evolution in the mud", [4]

and his conclusion is

"If my body come from brutes, tho' somewhat
finer that their own,
I am heir, and this my kingdom. Shall the
royal voice be mute?
Hold the sceptre, Human Soul, and rule thy
province of the brute" [5]

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1. The Ancient Sage.
2. In Memoriam , Canto CXVIII.
3. Ibid., Canto, CVIII.
4. Locksley Hall Sixty Hears After.
5. By An Evolutionist.

The firm trust and faith that Tennyson arrived at had not come through a process of reasoning but rested solely on the authority of an inner conviction, born of a mystical experience.

"For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
Nor yet disproven, Wherefore thou be wise,
Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith!"[1]

The moments of deep insight which he had known had given him a faith so strong that in answer to doubts returning

"A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answer'd I have felt'".[2]

Because he has felt, he can think of Hallam as

"That friend of Mine who lives in God,"
"That God which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."[3]

Although to some people, Tennyson's grounds for his faith do not seem convincing, no one denies that he at least was fully

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1. The Ancient Sage,
2. In Memoriam, Canto, CXXIV.
3. Ibid., Epilogue.

convinced. The reason for this is that the re-birth of Tennyson's faith came as a mystical achievement. Among the marks which James ascribes to mysticism are ineffability, the poetic quality and transiency,[1] all of which characterized Tennyson's experience. In the first place he felt his utter inability to explain it

"Vague words! but ah, how hard to frame
In matter-moulded forms of speech
Or even for intellect to reach
Thro' memory that which I became;"[2]

Then in the second place he had known insight into the depths of truth, feeling his soul whirled

"About empyreal heights of thought"[3]

Lastly, the length of the trances which he knew were always brief.[4]

Individuality was always to him one of the greatest mysteries of the world and from early boyhood he had known waking trances in which he seemed to lose his own identity and attained that great mystical achievement of becoming one with the absolute.[5] To quote his words "This has generally come upon me thro' repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless

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1. James, William, Varieties of Religious Experience, Chapter XVI.
2. In Memoriam, Canto XCV.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. James. Wm. Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 419.

being and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life".[1] Again in "The Ancient Sage", he describes a similar experience.

"I touch'd my limbs, the limbs
Were strange, not mine - and yet no shade of doubt,
But utter clearness, and thro' loss of self,
The gain of such large life as match'd with ours
Were sun to spark - unshadowable in words,
Themselves but shadows of a shadow - world"[2]

He wrote to Miss Sellwood in 1839: "To me often the far-off world seems nearer than the present, for in the present is always something unreal and indistinct but the other seems a good solid planet, rolling around it green hills and paradise to the harmony of more steadfast laws".[3] "Throughout his life he had a constant feeling of spiritual harmony existing between ourselves and the outward visible universe, and of the actual immanence of God in the Infinitesimal atom as in the vastest system".[4] The Holy Grail embodies this feeling of the reality of the unseen, the power

"By which thou wilt abide, if thou be wise,
As if thou knewest, tho' thou canst not know;"
For nothing worthy of proving can be proven,

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1. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir Vol. I, p. 320.

2. Tennyson, Alfred, The Ancient Sage.
3. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir, Vol. I, p. 320.
4. Ibid., p. 319.

Nor yet disproven , Wherefore thou be wise,
Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith!"[1]

He had stood out for the recognition of science in such a way that Scientific leaders like Herschel, Owen, Sedgwick and Lyndall regarded him as a champion of Science[2] but felt that only through the mystical power of faith could man be lifted to the highest realms . Lyndall wrote to Hallam Tennyson after his father's death: "Your father's interest in Science was profound, but not, I believe unmingled with fear of its materialistic tendencies "[3] and I think that Tennyson's poetry will bear out this assertion.

In the years that followed his first insight into the harmony between faith and intellect, his belief in God and immortality grew ever stronger. His son tells us : "Assuredly Religion was no nebulous abstraction for him. He consistently emphasized his own belief in what he called the Eternal Truths; in an Omnipotent, Omnipresent and all-loving God, Who has revealed himself through the human attribute of the highest self-sacrificing love; in the freedom of the human will; and in the immortality of the soul."[4] When he talked to his friends of religion, he always spoke confidently of a future existence and said of Christianity "it is rugging at my heart"[5]. He did not feel that creed was im-

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1. Tennyson, Alfred, The Ancient Sage.
2. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir, Vol. I, p. 298.
3. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir, Vol. p.
4. Ibid, Vol. I. p. 311.
5. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir, Vol. I, p. 263.

portant for "Different language does not always imply different opinions nor different opinions any difference in real faith."[1] He could sympathize with those who found their faith helpful by form and said once concerning his Catholic friend, Mr. W. G. Ward, "If I had Ward's blind faith I should always be happy"[1]. To him though truth was "so infinitely great that all we can do with our poor human utterances is to try and clothe it in such language as will make it dear to ourselves, and dear to those to whom God sends us with a message, but meanwhile, above us and our thoughts--- above our broken lights ---- God in His Mercy, God in His Love, God in his infinite nature is greater than all"[2]

Tennyson was little influenced by systems of philosophy and the hours which he spent listening to the debates in the "Metaphysical Society", of which he was a member only left him more fully convinced of the irrationality of pure materialism.[3] He felt that the religion of a person could never be founded on mere moral philosophy; and that it could only come home to them in the simple, noble thoughts and facts of a Scripture like ours"[4] He hoped that the Bible would be more and more studied by the people and expounded simply by their teachers.

Although Christianity for him did not lie in sect or creed, he sought to seize upon the permanent spirit which lay under the traditional form of a devout faith rather than to cast it off.[5]

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1. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir, Vol. II, p. 168.
2. Memoir, Vol. I, p. 311.
3. Ibid, Vol. II, p. 169.
4. Tennyson, Hallam, Memoir, Vol. I, p. 308.
5. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 172.

He placed a high value on formal worship and especially prized the sacrament of Holy Communion, a service in which he felt the especial nearness of Christ to him.[1]

One of the most essential factors to him in religious life was the power of prayer. He regarded prayer as "the highest aspiration of the soul"[2] and felt that this act was "like opening a sluice between the great ocean and our little channels when the great sea gathers itself together and flows in at full tide".[3]

"Speak to Him thou for he hears, and
Spirit with Spirit can meet-
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer
than hands and feet"[4]

As to the results of this mystical communion he believed

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of"[5]

Perhaps among the recorded prayers of Tennyson, the one that best illustrates his deep feeling and mystic faith is the anthem entitled "The Human Cry"

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1. Weld, Agnes Grace, Glimpses of Tennyson, p. 108.
2. Memoir, Vol. I, p. 324.
3. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 324.
4. The Higher Pantheism.
5. Morte d' Arthur.

"We feel that we are nothing-- for all is Thou and
in Thee;
We feel we are something- that also has come
from Thee;
We know we are nothing -- but Thou wilt
help us to be.
Hallowed be thy name -- Hallelujah"

As he neared the close of life and came to look more and more hopefully toward death as the gateway to a higher and happier life, the memory of his own doubts and struggles grew dimmer and it became harder for him to sympathize with those who were sceptically inclined. He particularly resented the breaking up the soil of any faith by those who had no better seed to sow.[1] It gave him inutterable distress of soul to hear the divinity of Christ assailed and he was depressed often by the thoughts of the terrible age of unfaith through which the world was passing. [2]

Tennyson's religious experience is of special interest , because he squarely faced the movements of his day and yet was able to come back to a child like faith in Christianity. Although so many of his contemporaries failed to reconcile the old religion with the new discoveries of science, he felt that when each was put in its proper place, the two were harmonious. His convictions in regard to religious truth were based on mystic insight and hence may seem to analytical minds as inconclusive but to many men of his own day who had gone through this same struggle, it seemed that "the

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1. Memoir, Vol. II, p. 350.

2. Ibid, Vol. II, p. 309.

poet had made a definite step towards the unification of the highest religion and philosophy with the progressive science of the day; and that he was the one poet who 'through the agonies of a death-struggle' had made an effective stand against his own doubts and difficulties and those of the time".[1] To all, though, there must be beauty in the picture of the old man, who after fighting the bitter fordes of sorrow and doubt, could at the close of life with calm peace in his heart utter those hopeful words

"For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The Flood may bear me far
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar,"[2]

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1. Memoir, Vol. I, p. 298.
2. Crossing the Bar.

Chapter V

THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES OF GEORGE ELIOT, NEWMAN AND TENNYSON STUDIED COMPARATIVELY

The religious experiences of George Eliot, Cardinal Newman and Lord Tennyson show us three very different types of reaction to the movements of the nineteenth century thought and yet, in spite of this fact, there is a striking similarity in the general process of their religious development. We shall attempt then, first of all, to bring out the elements which their experiences had in common and in the second place try to discover, as far as possible, why they reached such widely diverging conclusions.

The first similarity of their experiences lies in the fact that all of them were converted to some religious faith in their early teens and that in each case, conversion seems to have meant an opening of the eyes to a spiritual world, here-to-fore unknown to them, and an awakening of a strong desire to enter into this spiritual life. The particular faith which each one adopted at this adolescent conversion seems to have depended entirely on the strongest religious influence, thrown round him at that time. All had been born into the Established Church, but in the cases of George Eliot and Cardinal Newman, fervent Calvinists with whom they came in contact lighted the fires of religious enthusiasm which the lethargic church of England did not attempt to arouse. Tennyson, however, received the religious impressions which led to his conversion in his own home, probably from his devoutly religious mother.

Then as each of them came to the wider intellectual horizon of the early twenties, he found that there must be some other basis for religious belief than the blind, unquestioning faith of childhood. In George Eliot's life, reaction against her early beliefs came because the extreme emotional fervor and asceticism of her teens could not bring satisfaction to the rapidly developing powers of an analytical mind. Newman, possessed of a mind equally logical, came similarly to feel that his faith must have an intellectual basis. Tennyson, who was not possessed of an intellect so eminently analytical, came to feel in a testing time of bitter sorrow that his naive trust in a benignant God was no longer an adequate conception and he too turned to seek a new basis for belief.

We now come to the more difficult question of determining why three people, who had accepted Christianity in early years, seemingly in much the same fashion, and who, at the time of intellectual awakening, were placed amidst the same currents of religious thought, in struggling to find the highest truth came to such different decisions concerning it. Our only attempt at explanation will be to show that George Eliot came to her conclusions because she looked at religion from the point of view of a realist, that Newman regarded it through the eyes of asceticism; and that Tennyson was essentially a mystic.

The problem confronting them was the same. The rapid advance of science and the growth of rationalism made the old conception of religion seem strikingly inadequate. In what then could one put his faith in the face of advanced knowledge and mature insight? The conclusions that each reached grew out of differing

major premises, which the prevailing tendencies in different natures led each to adopt,yet there was one principle which lay at the root of the new-birth of faith in each life --- the principle of self-renunciation. No matter what their dis-similarities were, it was only in getting out of the "self" into the "thou" that each of these people worked out his spiritual Salvation.

George Eliot believedprimarily that honesty demanded the casting off of all preconceptions and the acceptance of no beliefs, however desirable they might seem, unless her intellect could find support for their truth. Facing the problems of religion then, through eyes enlightened by science she felt that she had been clinging to false hopes and turned resolutely away from her early faith, preferring to accept a painful view of life which her intellect told her to be true, than to delude herself with the beautiful illusions which the opium of an optimistic religion might produce. She could not put her faith in a God, whose existence she could not prove, but she found satisfaction in the renunciation of self and the dedication of her life to the advancement of humanity.

Newman on the other hand, facing the revolutionary tendencies of scientific knowledge, saw in following the attractive paths of intellectual excellence a straight road to Atheism. Instinctively he shuddered from reaching such an end and his natural love of logic and intellectual truth gave way to the stronger force of his asceticism which bade him renounce them. His major premise was then that pure reason could lead to nothing but ruin and, in its place, he enthroned history as his guide. This led him to

believe that what his age needed was the faith of the early church and following out his reasoning from the premises laid down, he concluded that the only alternative for Atheism was a revival of mediaeval Catholicism. Newman's ascetecism made the very attractiveness of intellectual solution seem a symptom of its danger and for him self-renunciation meant submitting the powers of his own reasoning to the authority of a church, which he regarded as the only stronghold against the powers of darkness.

Tennyson, however, on looking into the face of science, found it most admirable, but saw nothing in it to take the place of religion. Through out his spiritual conflict, he was motivated by the firm conviction that, unless the existence of God could be proved by some means which could transcend the teachings of science there was nothing in life worth living for. His struggle then lay in determining whether or not this could be proved and if so how? The answer to this problem came in a mystical revelation of higher truth, in which, lost to self, he felt himself at one with the infinite, and gained perfect assurance that there was a God of love and a life after death. In the light of this assurance, science and religion became for him two complementary forces.

An interesting story is told of George Eliot and Tennyson in which some light is thrown on realism versus mysticism. Tennyson writes: "She called, and when she went away I pressed her hand kindly and sweetly , and said, 'I wish you well with your molecules'. She replied as gently "I get on very well with molecules'" She preferred molecules which were facts to a heaven which was a delusion while to Tennyson the molecules were very meaningless facts without

the heaven. Newman on the other hand, although very much like her in many respects, had little sympathy with George Eliot for his asceticism had led him to subordinate the truths of science to the authority of the church and with his absolute standards of right and wrong it was impossible for him to sympathize with those who sought truth through the molecules alone.

Of the three, Newman was perhaps the most confident in his beliefs, at least the most dogmatic in expression of them. Concerning Tennyson, the complaint has sometimes been made that "he protests too much" and that he sings only as one who hopes not as one who knows. It seems to me however that, although he was not always on the mountain tops of faith, his experiences there were so strong as to be the most powerful influences in his life, which gave him on the whole, a steadfast confidence in things spiritual. Unlike them George Eliot had neither an absolute authority nor an optimistic faith in which to put her trust but there is that same quality of self renunciation in her life which gives to her "conscious, clear-eyed endurance" a true nobility. Always there was a touch of wistful regret in her latter life, to know that the Christian faith so dear to her childhood had become imcompatible with mature knowledge.

If, however, George Eliot was the least certain as to her beliefs, or possibly because of that fact, she was at the same time the most tolerant of all religious faiths, while Newman as the most confident, from the very nature of his beliefs was least tolerant. Tennyson's toleration for all honest seekers after truth, which was especially broad when he struggled with his own doubts tended to lessen as his confidence in his mystic faith grew stronger.

None of them was a purely destructive critic of religion for each sought to build up a definite faith although Newman was the only one, who at the close of life was willing to formulate his beliefs in a definite creed. Each of them had a strong feeling for the responsibility of their influence over others and each sought to avoid sowing seeds of doubt where faith had been before.

It is interesting to contemplate the widely divergent roads down which three sincere seekers after truth, who had stood at the same cross roads in their early twenties, chose to come. The shadows of all the movements of the nineteenth century flitted across each as he made his decision and the path which he chose seems to have depended on the predominating force in his character. Perhaps everyone does not need the same religion[1] or perhaps different paths may lead to the same destination, and it is given to but few to find the most direct route thither. At any rate all battled valiantly to reach the desired goal and in the principle of self-renunciation each seemed to find peace, although the forms which this took differed very widely. As to whether George Eliot, through her realism, Cardinal Newman through his asceticism or Tennyson through his mysticism caught the fullest vision of truth is perhaps a question which can only be answered by the individual through his own religious experience.

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1. James, William, Variety of Religious Experiences, p. 487.

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